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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PHNOM PENH 000743

SENSITIVE  
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SUBJECT: MGEAP1: CAMBODIA COPING WITH KETSANA, SO FAR

REF: (A) PHNOM PENH 000734 (B) STATE 103261

¶1. (U) Summary: Ketsana's high winds and heavy rains continue to impact people in eight of Cambodia's 24 provinces. NGOs, the Cambodia Red Cross (CRC) and provincial governments appear to be meeting immediate needs of the displaced without requesting additional donor assistance. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has not declared a disaster or appealed for external help. Nearly 100,000 hectares (ha) of rice appear to have been destroyed or damaged within a month of the normal November harvest, prompting concern for food security and agricultural livelihoods over the near future. Donors will need to accurately assess the floods' effect on paddies if rehabilitation is necessary, and to ensure that the poorest have sufficient food for the coming dry season. End Summary.

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INCONSISTENT DAMAGE ASSESSMENTS PREDOMINATE . . .  
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¶2. (SBU) Typhoon Ketsana's impact on Cambodia remains evident by the number of temporarily displaced families, hundreds of kilometers of destroyed roads, nearly 100,000 ha of submerged crops, hundreds of damaged houses, fallen bridges, and many flooded schools and pagodas. Unfortunately, reliable, verified data has been difficult to come by and is sometimes contradictory. Headlines in the English dailies on Monday, set off by an Oxfam International press release on October 3, suggested the nation was on the verge of a crisis. The government's, UN agencies, NGO and donors' views have been more judicious in their assessments. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries reported separately that Ketsana had "affected" 79,000 ha and destroyed 5,000 ha of paddy across the eight provinces hit by the storm, nearly two thirds of which are in Siem Reap and Kampong Thom provinces; these numbers represent about 3.5 percent of the total rice under cultivation last year.

¶3. (SBU) The National Committee for Disaster Management's (NCDM) official report, which is likely to be the most comprehensive overview available, will be made public on October 8 -- Embassy staff will attend the meeting. NCDM data is compiled from Provincial Committees for Disaster Management (PCDM, one in each province), which in turn receive reports from the CRC and NGOs working in the various areas -- principally Care, Caritas, Muslim Aid, Oxfam, World Vision, Plan International, Action Aid and Church World Service. Unofficially, the NCDM data blames the storm for 20 deaths and 65 injuries. In addition, NCDM reports that Ketsana destroyed nearly 1,000 houses and damaged another 2,400, flooded 110 schools, and damaged nearly 2,000 km of roads. NCDM also reported nearly 8,700 displaced families, the vast majority of them Kampong Thom and Kampong Cham provinces. Finally, the unofficial NCDM data indicated over 60,000 ha of paddy rice damaged, and another 34,500 ha flooded.

¶4. (U) Bilateral donors rely on the expert assessments of the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF -- which analyze NGO and provincial

reports, compare reports with known populations and normal conditions, and make representative field visits -- to ground-truth reporting and eliminate double counting as much as possible. UNICEF data indicates that 25,600 families in the 5 provinces of Stueng Trang, Siem Reap, Kampong Thom, Rattanakiri and Kampong Cham have been affected by Ketsana, conservatively over 100,000 people. However, UNICEF has reported a smaller number of displaced families compared to the NCDM and Oxfam data.

15. (SBU) Both WFP and UNICEF believe the NCDM data for the displaced probably include normal rainy season movements of local rice-farming populations. It is possible that a portion of the displaced in the NCDM and Oxfam reporting include those who had already temporarily relocated to higher ground during seasonal flooding, moving into houses of family members more distant from their seasonally inundated village paddies. More clearly, WFP opines that overall, small pockets of people have had to move, but not huge groups from broad geographic areas.

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. . . BUT NEEDS HAVE LARGELY BEEN MET  
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16. (SBU) A great number of people has clearly been affected by Ketsana's heavy rains and winds. Nonetheless, both UNICEF and WFP believe provincial authorities have sufficient money and rice, through themselves and the NGOs operating in those areas, to deal with the worst affected. They also believe that the provincial governments have been responsive and coordinated well with the CRC and NGOs. WFP reported that it contacted every NGO involved with emergency assistance throughout the eight affected provinces, including the CRC, and all responded that they have been able to

PHNOM PENH 00000743 002 OF 002

meet all immediate needs for temporary housing, food, mosquito netting, and water; none asked for additional assistance from the WFP or the donor community. (Several embassies gave small contributions to the CRC, and the CRC raised \$441,000 in a fund raising concert held by Bayon TV on October 5.)

17. (U) Barring additional heavy rains or storms, waters are receding in most northern provinces, though both Mondulkiri and Rattanakiri provinces expect strong seasonal winds and rain to continue. However, Mekong River Commission measurements show that river levels are dropping in Stueng Trang and Kratie provinces, and stable at Kampong Cham town. Flood waters in Siem Reap have receded, but swaths of Kampong Thom farmland are still under water. As expected, rivers south of Kampong Cham are rising, but are not expected to surpass alarm levels.

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LONGER TERM NEXT STEPS  
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18. (U) We expect that a number of communities will be affected in the longer term due to the loss of family rice paddies. The RGC, provincial authorities and donors will need to more fully assess Ketsana's effect on the very broad area of affected rice and farmland for possible future rehabilitation and reconstruction. It is possible that some of the hectareage reported as damaged, or "affected," may indeed be harvested. Embassy Phnom Penh continues to closely monitor the situation and will provide updates as events progress.

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